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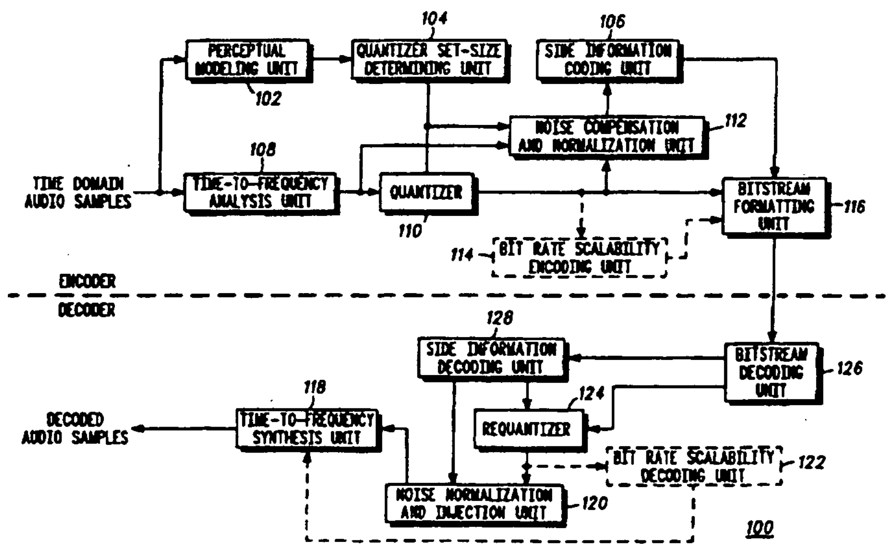
(54) Title: METHOD, DEVICE, AND SYSTEM FOR AN EFFICIENT NOISE INJECTION PROCESS FOR LOW BITRATE AUDIO COMPRESSION

(57) Abstract

The present invention provides a device, method (400, 500), and system (100) of noise injection to maximize compressed audio quality while enabling bitrate scalability. It includes at least one of an encoder and a decoder. The encoder includes a zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining a control signal that indicates whether noise injection is implemented and a normalization computation unit, coupled to receive at least unquantized signal values and the control signal, for determining a normalization term in accordance with the control signal. The decoder includes a zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining a control signal that indicates when noise injection is active and a noise generation and normalization unit, coupled to receive a normalization term and the control signal, for generating, normalizing, and injecting a predetermined noise signal where indicated by the control signal.



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METHOD, DEVICE, AND SYSTEM FOR AN EFFICIENT NOISE INJECTION PROCESS FOR LOW BITRATE AUDIO COMPRESSION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to high quality generic audio compression, and more particularly, to high quality generic audio compression at low bit rates.

Background

Modern, high-quality, generic, audio compression algorithms take advantage of the noise masking characteristics of the human auditory system to compress audio data without causing perceptible distortions in the reconstructed audio signal. This form of compression is also known as perceptual coding. Most algorithms code a predetermined, fixed, number of time-domain audio samples, a 'frame' of data, at a time. Since the noise masking properties depend on frequency, the first step of a perceptual coder is to map a frame of audio data to the frequency domain. The output of this time-to-frequency mapping process is a frequency domain signal where the signal components are grouped according to subbands of frequency. A psychoacoustic model analyzes the signal to determine both the signal-dependent and

signal-independent noise masking characteristics as a function of frequency. These masking characteristics are expressed as signal-to-mask ratios for each subband of frequency. A quantizer can then use these ratios to determine how to quantize the signal components within each subband such that the quantization noise will be inaudible. Quantizing the signal in this manner reduces the number of bits needed to represent the audio signal without necessarily degrading the perceived audio quality of the resulting signal.

As long as there are enough code bits to guarantee that the quantization noise will be less than the noise masking level within each subband, the coding process will not produce audible distortions. In the case of very low bitrate coding of audio signals, this will usually not be the case. Under these conditions, the quantizer attempts to mask as much of the quantization noise as possible based on the signal-to-mask ratios computed by the psychoacoustic model. Sometimes this causes the quantizer to alternately quantize certain subbands to all zeroes, then quantize the same subbands to non-zero values from one frame of data to the next. This alternating turn-on and turn-off of subbands produces very unnatural swishing or warbling artifact sounds.

Bitrate scalability is a useful feature for data compression coder and decoders. A scalable coder encodes a

signal at a high bitrate so that subsets of this bitstream can be decoded at lower bitrates. One application of this feature is the remote browsing of data without the burden of downloading the full, high bitrate data file. For the efficient use of code bits, the low bitrate streams should be used to help reconstruct the higher bitrate streams. One approach is to first encode data at a lowest supported bitrate, then encode an error between the original signal and a decoded lowest bitrate signal to form a second lowest bitrate bitstream and so on. For this scheme to work, the error signal must be easier to compress than the original. For this to be the case, the signal-to-noise ratio of each decoded output should be maximized. This is not the case for most noise shaping techniques used in speech coding.

Thus, there is a need for a device, method and system that provides an efficient method of improving the quality of compressed audio signals by masking the unnatural swishing artifacts, and where selected, by facilitating scalable bitrate coding.

Brief Descriptions of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an audio compression system that utilizes an encoder and a decoder in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a noise computation and normalization unit of the encoder of FIG. 1 shown with greater particularity.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a noise normalization and injection unit of the decoder of FIG. 1 shown with greater particularity.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart of steps for a preferred embodiment of steps of a method in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart of steps for another preferred embodiment of steps of a method in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description of a Preferred Embodiment

The present invention provides a novel device, method and system for noise injection into a compressed audio signal. This invention improves the audio quality of highly compressed

audio data by reducing the audibility of artificial sounding compression artifacts. These artifacts are caused by alternately turning on and off frequency subbands. Alternative approaches, as the approach described in U.S. patent application serial number 08/207.995 by James Fiocca et al., incorporated herein by reference, may either reduce the bandwidth of the compressed audio signal or increase the audibility of noise in other parts of the spectrum. The present invention offers these improvements with a very low coding overhead. In one implementation of the present invention, only 4 bits of overhead code are needed per frame (1024 samples) of audio data. The invention has an additional advantage in that it does not adversely affect the signal-to-noise ratio of the coded signal. This is advantageous for bitrate scalable coding. Noise can be injected at the last stage of decoding. Pre-noise-injected versions of the decoded signals can be summed together to build the highest-bitrate, highest-fidelity, version of the decoded signal.

FIG. 1, numeral 100, is a block diagram of one embodiment of an audio compression system that utilizes at least one of an encoder and a decoder in accordance with the present invention. FIG. 4 , numeral 400, is a flow chart of steps for a preferred embodiment of steps of a method in accordance with the present invention. FIG. 5, numeral 500, is

a flow chart of steps for another preferred embodiment of steps of a method in accordance with the present invention.

Different noise injection processing is used in the encoder and the decoder (404, 504).

The encoder includes a noise computation and normalization unit (112). FIG. 2, numeral 200, is a block diagram of one embodiment of a noise computation and normalization unit shown with greater particularity. The noise computation and normalization unit consists of: A) a zero detection unit (202) that is coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, and is used for determining, a control signal that indicates whether noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme; B) a normalization computation unit (204) that is coupled to receive at least unquantized subband values and the control signal from the zero detection unit, and is used for determining an energy normalization term based on the unquantized subband values in accordance with the control signal.

During encoding, audio data is processed by a time-to-frequency analysis unit (108) a frame of samples at a time (402, 502). The time-to-frequency analysis unit maps time domain audio samples to a frequency domain. The frame of

audio samples is also processed simultaneously by a perceptual modeling unit (102). The perceptual modeling unit computes a signal-to-mask ratio for each subband of frequency. A quantizer step-size determining unit (104) uses these ratios to determine a quantizer step-size for each subband of frequency. A quantizer (110) quantizes the frequency domain samples using the computed step-sizes. A noise computation and normalization unit (112) evaluates quantized subband values from the quantizer to determine if a noise signal is to be injected (202) and computes a normalization term. The normalization term scales the injected noise.

In order to produce more subjectively pleasing noise injected sounds, the injected noise may be colored by a pre-determined noise energy profile (412, 428). A linearly decreasing ramp profile:

profiled_noise(f) = noise(f)*[HIGHLIM - f]/[HIGHLIM - LOWLIM]

provides acceptable results. HIGHLIM and LOWLIM are predetermined constants. For example, values of HIGHLIM equal to 145 and LOWLIM of zero are appropriate for coding at six kilobits per second with a frame size of 1024.

In order to have accurate values for the noise normalization term, the noise values injected at the encoder should be the same as the noise values injected at a decoder.

For this to be the case, identical random noise generators should be used at the encoder and decoder and seeds for the generators should be the same (410, 426). In one embodiment, an audio frame number (computed within blocks 204 and 304) is used to seed the random noise generators for each frame. Other seeds available to both the encoder and decoder, such as code bits within the code bitstream representing the frame of data, may be used.

The method of noise generation by seeding and noise coloring with a noise profile may be omitted, where selected, from embodiments of the invention (510, 520).

The invention accommodates two implementations of the audio compression system. One implementation codes an individual quantizer step-size for each pre-defined frequency region. The other implementation codes a single global step-size for the entire frame. The invention accommodates both implementations of the audio compression system by checking (416, 512).

In the audio compression system where there is a quantizer step-size for each of several pre-determined subbands of frequency, the zero detection unit (202) detects when all values of a subband are quantized to zero (406, 506) and generates a control signal indicating whether there are all

zeros in any pre-defined regions (408, 508). If all pre-defined regions contain non-zero values, the noise processing is ended for the frame (434, 526), otherwise a normalization term replaces the quantizer step-size for each subband that was quantized to all zeroes (420, 516). The normalization term is based on a ratio of a sum energy of the unquantized frequency domain samples within a pre-determined subband that have all been quantized to zero and a sum energy of the injected noise (204,414,510).

In the audio compression system where there may be only one global quantizer step-size for the entire frame, the noise normalization term is coded in addition to the quantizer step-size (418, 514). Instead of detecting when all values of a subband are quantized to zero, the zero detection unit (202) detects whenever any frequency value in a frame of audio data gets quantized to zero (406, 506) and generates a control signal indicating whether there are any zeros in the frame (408, 508). If the frame contains only non-zero values, the noise processing is ended for the frame (434, 526). The noise normalization term is based on a ratio of a sum energy of all of the unquantized frequency domain samples within the frame that were quantized to zero and a sum energy of the injected noise (204, 414, 510). In this implementation there will be only one normalization term for each frame of audio samples.

To efficiently represent the noise normalization term with only a few code bits, a coded representation is sent to a side information coding unit (106, 418, 420, 514, 516). The coded representation of this term is equal to one half of the logarithm, base 2, of the one of the two ratios (depending on the implementation) described above. In mathematical terms, this may expressed as:

Coded_reprensentation $= K \times \log_2 (\Sigma \ (x^2(n)/y^2(n)) \ )$

where:

n is	the index of samples in the frame.
K is	a constant,
$x^2(n)$ is	the original energy of the signal. samples that were quantized to zero. and
$y^2(n)$ is	the energy of the noise to be substituted for samples quantized to zero.

Side information is sent to a bitstream formatting unit (116) which also encodes the quantized frequency domain samples. This completes the noise injection processing for the frame of audio data (434, 526)

Since the quantized frequency domain samples are free of injected noise at the encoder, an optional bitrate

scalability encoding unit (114) may directly use the quantized samples for difference coding.

The decoder includes a noise normalization and injection unit (120). FIG. 3, numeral 300, is a block diagram of one embodiment of a noise normalization and injection unit shown with greater particularity. The noise normalization and injection unit consists of: A) a zero detection unit (302), coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining, a control signal that indicates implementation of noise injection according to a predetermined scheme when values of the frequency domain quantized signal are zero; and B) a noise generation and normalization unit (304), coupled to receive the energy normalization term and the control signal from the zero detection unit, for substituting a predetermined noise signal multiplied by the energy normalization term where indicated by the control signal.

For decoding, a bitstream decoding unit (126) decodes the quantized frequency domain samples and sends the samples to a requantizer (124). The bitstream decoding unit also sends coded side information to a side information decoding unit (128). The side information decoding unit decodes a quantizer step-size and noise normalization term(s). The side information decoding unit sends the quantizer step-size to the requantizer (124) and the normalization term to a noise

normalization and injection unit (120). The noise normalization and injection unit detects where the requantized frequency domain samples were quantized to zero (302) and injects noise according to a pre-determined scheme (304).

In audio compression systems where there is a quantizer step-size for each of several pre-determined subbands of frequency, the noise computation and normalization unit (304) injects noise only into the all-zeroed subbands (422, 424, 432, 518, 520, 524).

In audio compression systems where there is only one global quantizer step-size for the entire frame, the noise normalization term is coded in addition to the global quantizer step-size. There will be only one normalization term for each frame of audio samples. Instead of detecting when all values of a subband are quantized to zero, the zero detection unit (302, 422, 518) detects whenever any frequency value in the frame of audio data is quantized to zero (424, 520). The noise computation and normalization unit (304) injects noise to all of these zeroed values (432).

To decode the noise normalization term, the decoder multiplies the coded representation of the normalization term by a factor less than or equal to 2. The factor is set based on

the perceived audio quality and may be adjusted at the decoder. The product is raised to the second power to obtain the noise normalization term. The noise signal is generated with the random number generator and seed (426) as described above, then optionally colored (428) by the same pre-determined noise profile in the encoder and multiplied by the noise normalization term (430). The invention does not require noise generation based on a particular seed or noise coloring (522). The processed noise is injected into the quantized frequency domain samples that were quantized to zero (432, 524). These samples are sent to the time-to-frequency synthesis unit (118) for final decoding to time domain audio samples.

If selected, the requantized sample values may be used by a bitrate scalability decoding unit (122) before noise is injected by the noise normalization and injection unit (120). Thus the scalability unit accesses clean sample values with higher signal-to-noise ratio than the noise injected sample values. The clean sample values are accumulated for each successive higher bitrate before sending the result for the time-to-frequency synthesis unit (118).

The method and device of the present invention may be selected to be embodied in least one of: A) an application specific integrated circuit; B) a field programmable gate

array; C) a microprocessor; and D) a computer-readable memory; arranged and configured for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality in accordance with the scheme described in greater detail above.

I claim:

1. A device for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality, comprising: at least one of an encoder and a decoder:

A) the encoder including a noise computation and normalization unit comprising:

1) a zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining, a control signal that indicates whether noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme;

2) a normalization computation unit, coupled to receive at least unquantized subband values and the control signal from the zero detection unit, for determining an energy normalization term based on the unquantized subband values in accordance with the control signal;

B) the decoder including a noise normalization and injection unit comprising:

1) zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining, a control signal that indicates implementation of noise injection according to a predetermined scheme when values of the frequency domain quantized signal are zero; and

2) a noise generation and normalization unit, coupled to receive the energy normalization term and the control signal from the zero detection unit, for substituting a

predetermined noise signal multiplied by the energy normalization term where indicated by the control signal.

2. The device of claim 1 wherein the noise normalization and injection unit in the decoder is placed subsequent to bitrate scalability module/modules.

3. The device of claim 1 wherein, in the encoder, the input to the normalization computation unit further includes a quantization step size and the unit substitutes the energy normalization term for the quantizer step size value in accordance with the control signal.

4. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is embodied in least one of:

A) an application specific integrated circuit;

B) a field programmable gate array;

C) a microprocessor; and

D) a computer-readable memory;

arranged and configured for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality in accordance with the scheme of claim 1.

5. A method for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality, comprising the steps of at least one of A-B:

A) in an encoder, including the steps of:

1) determining, by a zero detection unit, a control signal that indicates whether noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme;

2) determining, by a noise injection unit, an energy normalization term based at least on unquantized subband values in accordance with the control signal;

B) in a decoder, the steps of:

1) determining, by zero detection unit, a control signal that indicates implementation of noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme when values of the frequency domain quantized signal are zero; and

2) substituting, by a noise injection unit, a predetermined noise signal multiplied by the energy normalization term where indicated by the control signal.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein noise normalization and injection is implemented in the decoder subsequent to utilizing bitrate scalability module/modules.

7. The method of claim 5 further including, in the encoder, substituting an energy normalization term for a quantizer step size value where indicated by the control signal.

8. The method of claim 5 wherein the energy normalization term is determined in accordance with an equation of a form:

$$K \times \log_2 \left(\Sigma \; (x^2(n)/y^2(n)) \right)$$

where:

n is	the index of samples in the frame,
K is	a constant,
$x^2(n)$ is	the original energy of the signal samples that were quantized to zero, and
$y^2(n)$ is	the energy of the noise to be substituted for samples quantized to zero.

9. The method of claim 5 wherein the method is a process whose steps are embodied in least one of:

A) an application specific integrated circuit;

B) a field programmable gate array;

C) a microprocessor; and

D) a computer-readable memory;

arranged and configured for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality in accordance with the scheme of claim 4.

10. A system for efficient noise injection for low bitrate audio compression to maximize audio quality, wherein the system includes at least one of A-B

A) The encoder including a noise substitution and normalization unit comprising:

1) a zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining, a control

signal that indicates whether noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme;

2) a normalization computation unit, coupled to receive at least unquantized subband values and the control signal from the zero detection unit, for determining an energy normalization term based on the unquantized subband values in accordance with the control signal;

B) The decoder including a noise normalization and injection unit comprising:

1) zero detection unit, coupled to receive a frequency domain quantized signal, for determining, a control signal that indicates implementation of noise injection is implemented in accordance with a predetermined scheme when values of the frequency domain quantized signal are zero; and

2) a noise generation and normalization unit, coupled to receive the energy normalization term and the control signal from the zero detection unit, for substituting a predetermined noise signal multiplied by the energy normalization term where indicated by the control signal.

1/4

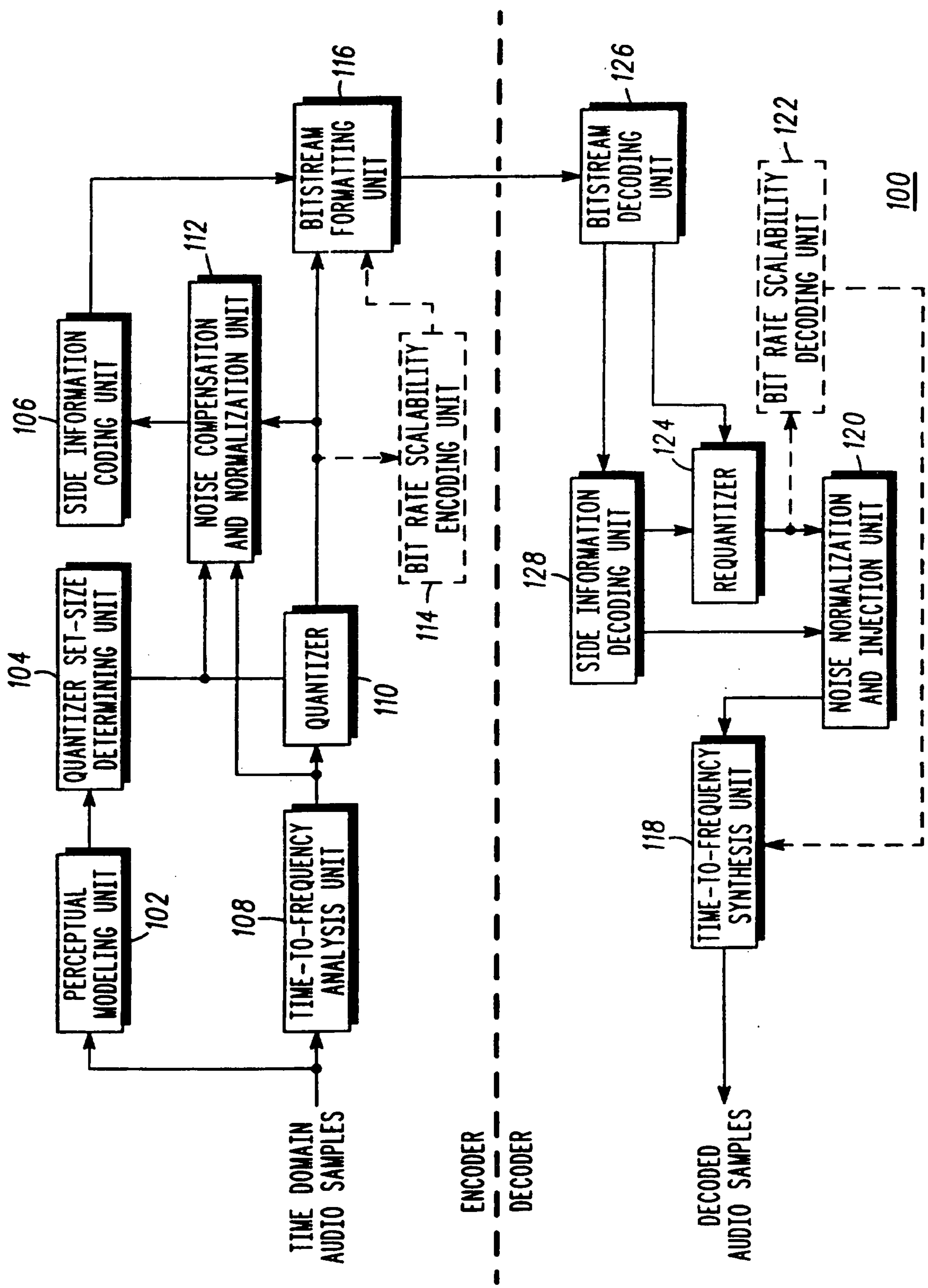
TIME DOMAIN AUDIO SAMPLES
PERCEPTUAL MODELING UNIT
102
QUANTIZER SET-SIZE DETERMINING UNIT
104
SIDE INFORMATION CODING UNIT
106
TIME-TO-FREQUENCY ANALYSIS UNIT
108
QUANTIZER
110
NOISE COMPENSATION AND NORMALIZATION UNIT
112
BIT RATE SCALABILITY ENCODING UNIT
114
BITSTREAM FORMATTING UNIT
116
ENCODER
DECODER
BITSTREAM DECODING UNIT
126
SIDE INFORMATION DECODING UNIT
128
REQUANTIZER
124
BIT RATE SCALABILITY DECODING UNIT
122
NOISE NORMALIZATION AND INJECTION UNIT
120
TIME-TO-FREQUENCY SYNTHESIS UNIT
118
DECODED AUDIO SAMPLES
100

FIG.1

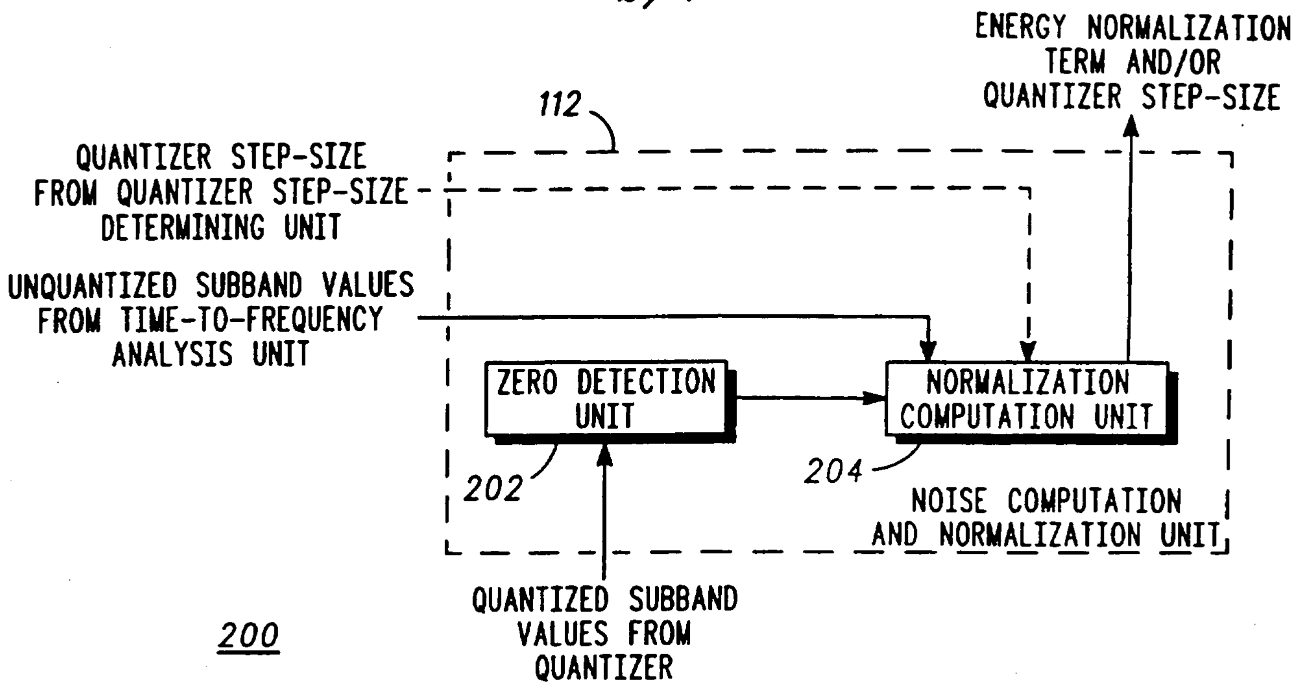
ENERGY NORMALIZATION TERM AND/OR QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE
112
QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE FROM QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE DETERMINING UNIT
UNQUANTIZED SUBBAND VALUES FROM TIME-TO-FREQUENCY ANALYSIS UNIT
ZERO DETECTION UNIT
NORMALIZATION COMPUTATION UNIT
202
204
NOISE COMPUTATION AND NORMALIZATION UNIT
QUANTIZED SUBBAND VALUES FROM QUANTIZER
200

FIG. 2

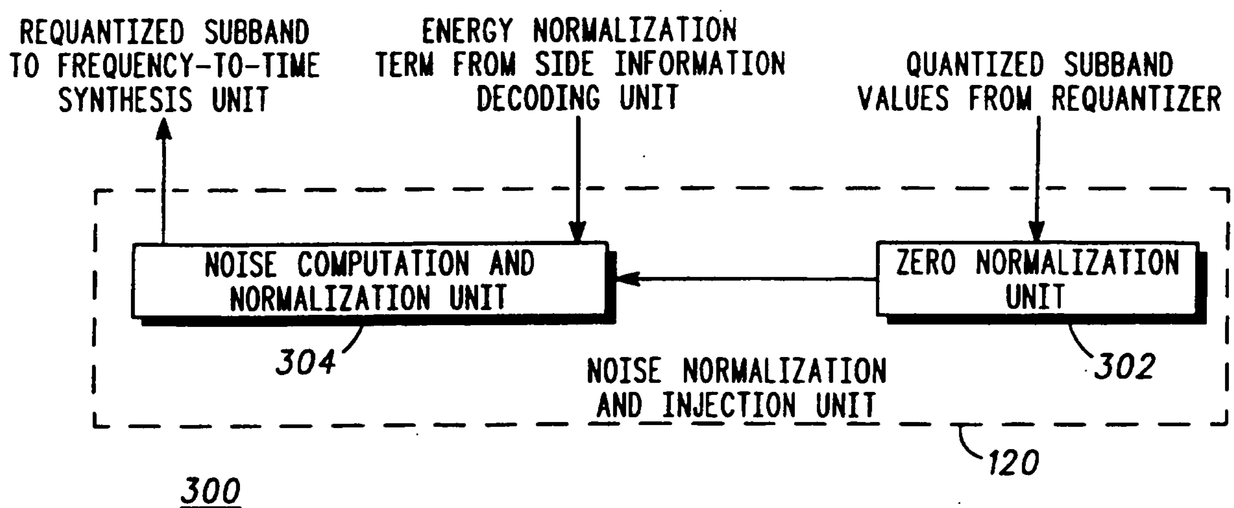
REQUANTIZED SUBBAND TO FREQUENCY-TO-TIME SYNTHESIS UNIT
ENERGY NORMALIZATION TERM FROM SIDE INFORMATION DECODING UNIT
QUANTIZED SUBBAND VALUES FROM REQUANTIZER
NOISE COMPUTATION AND NORMALIZATION UNIT
ZERO NORMALIZATION UNIT
304
302
NOISE NORMALIZATION AND INJECTION UNIT
120
300

FIG. 3

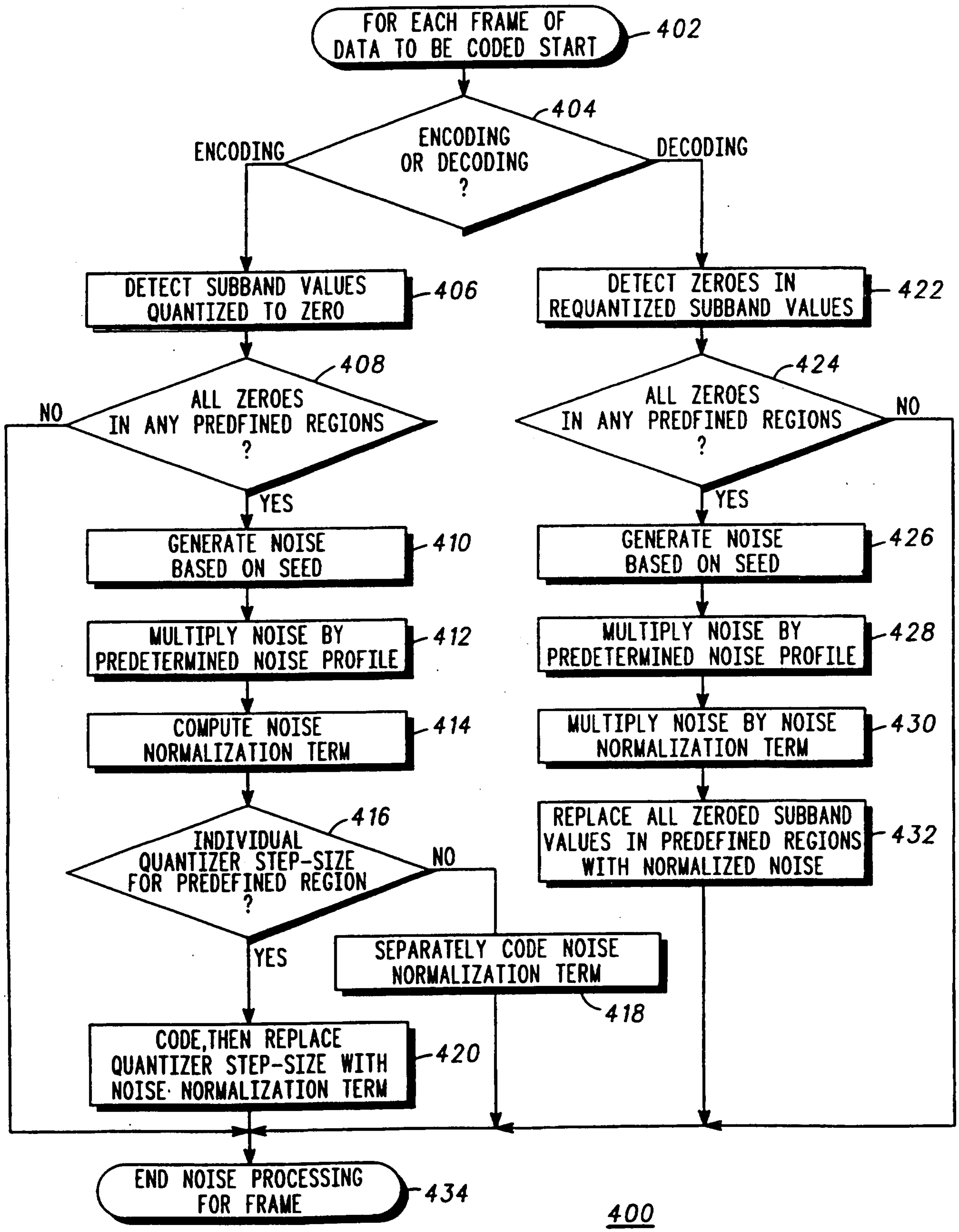
FOR EACH FRAME OF DATA TO BE CODED START
402
ENCODING OR DECODING ?
404
ENCODING
DECODING
DETECT SUBBAND VALUES QUANTIZED TO ZERO
406
ALL ZEROES IN ANY PREDFINED REGIONS ?
408
NO
YES
GENERATE NOISE BASED ON SEED
410
MULTIPLY NOISE BY PREDETERMINED NOISE PROFILE
412
COMPUTE NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
414
INDIVIDUAL QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE FOR PREDEFINED REGION ?
416
NO
YES
SEPARATELY CODE NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
418
CODE, THEN REPLACE QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE WITH NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
420
DETECT ZEROES IN REQUANTIZED SUBBAND VALUES
422
ALL ZEROES IN ANY PREDFINED REGIONS ?
424
NO
YES
GENERATE NOISE BASED ON SEED
426
MULTIPLY NOISE BY PREDETERMINED NOISE PROFILE
428
MULTIPLY NOISE BY NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
430
REPLACE ALL ZEROED SUBBAND VALUES IN PREDEFINED REGIONS WITH NORMALIZED NOISE
432
END NOISE PROCESSING FOR FRAME
434
400

FIG. 4

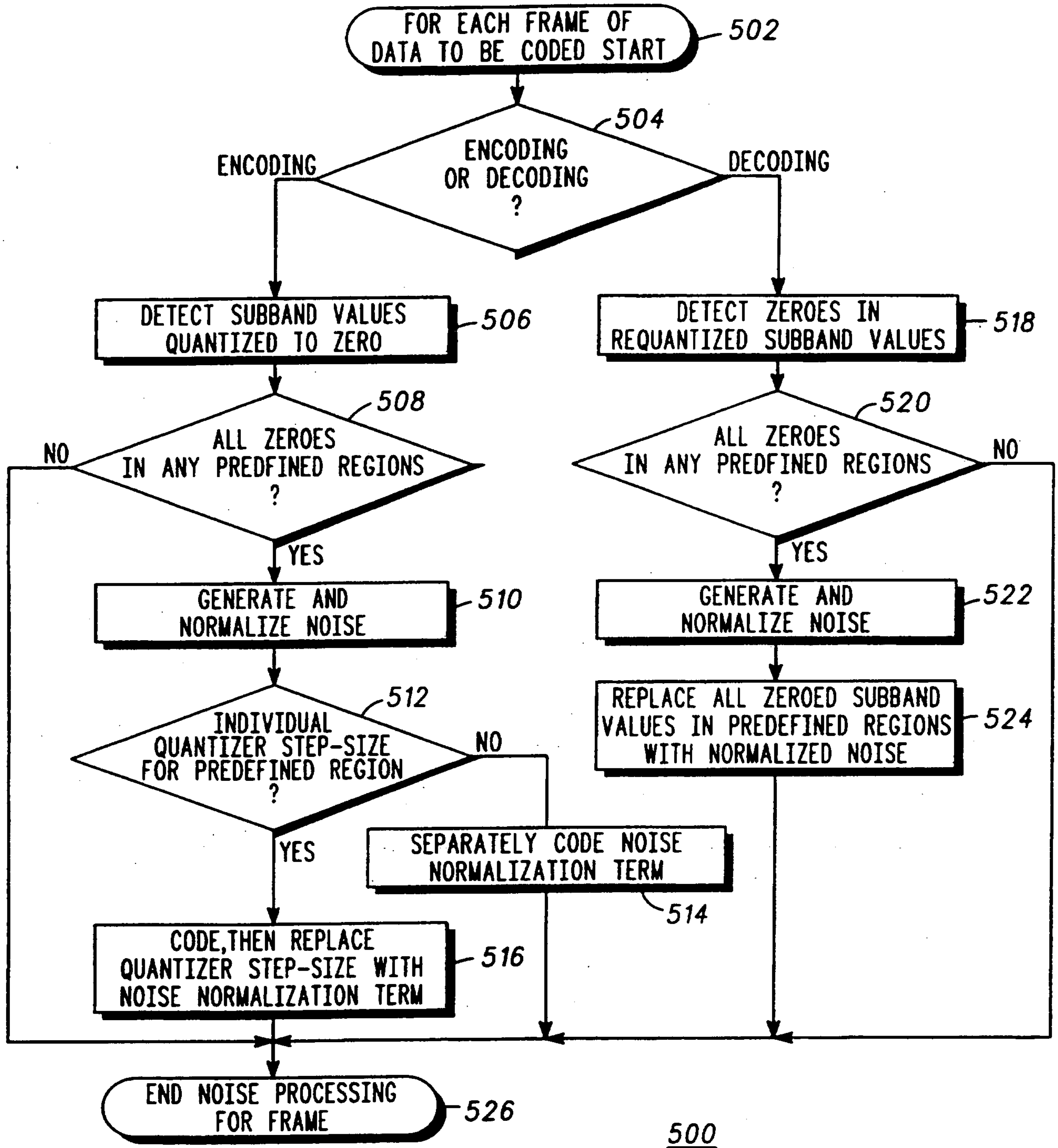
FOR EACH FRAME OF DATA TO BE CODED START
502
ENCODING OR DECODING ?
504
ENCODING
DECODING
DETECT SUBBAND VALUES QUANTIZED TO ZERO
506
DETECT ZEROES IN REQUANTIZED SUBBAND VALUES
518
ALL ZEROES IN ANY PREDFINED REGIONS ?
508
NO
YES
ALL ZEROES IN ANY PREDFINED REGIONS ?
520
NO
YES
GENERATE AND NORMALIZE NOISE
510
GENERATE AND NORMALIZE NOISE
522
INDIVIDUAL QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE FOR PREDEFINED REGION ?
512
NO
YES
REPLACE ALL ZEROED SUBBAND VALUES IN PREDEFINED REGIONS WITH NORMALIZED NOISE
524
SEPARATELY CODE NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
514
CODE,THEN REPLACE QUANTIZER STEP-SIZE WITH NOISE NORMALIZATION TERM
516
END NOISE PROCESSING FOR FRAME
526
500

FIG.5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US96/13959

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) :G10L 03/02
US CL : 395/2.39
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 395/2.39, 2.35, 2.92; 381/41-53

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

APS, IEEE, DIALOG, DRLINK

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,222,189 A (FIELDER) 22 June 1993, Abstract & col. 11, lines 26-32	1-2, 4-6, 8-10
X,P ----- Y,P	US 5,533,052 A (BHASKAR) 02 July 1996, Fig. 2, col. 10, lines 55-60; col. 13, lines 11-13	1-3, 5-7, 10 ------ 4, 8-9

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

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